Unitarian Horizons

March 15, 1938

BRAINS IN NEUTRAL

ANYONE who is a professional "speaker" knows the insidious peril so vividly — if not very gallantly — described in a sentence from a recent number of the *Reader's Digest:* "She shifted her brain into neutral, and let her tongue idle along." There are times when such a procedure is justified, of course, but it's always dangerous. And there are times when it would be the height of folly.

Suppose, for example, you are having lunch with forty or fifty students on the campus of one of the great State Universities of the Middle West, with half a dozen members of the faculty more or less on the fringe of the crowd. After lunch, you will be called on to talk for half an hour on some aspect of religion in the modern world; and then, those who don't have to rush off to one o'clock classes will be invited to gather round the big open fire and ask questions. If at any point you let your brain slip into neutral, under such circumstances, it will be fatal; and there isn't any tongue clever enough to "idle along" without instantly meriting and receiving the contempt of every boy and girl in the room.

IS RELIGION IMPORTANT?

CURIOUSLY enough, in any such gathering there will be at least a few who will expect you to make precisely that fatal mistake. If you have been announced as a preacher, they will have a pre-conceived and deeply rooted belief that you will not use your brains — if you have any. They have, I suppose, had rather disillusioning experiences in the past with ministers of religion; and if one could get right inside their heads I imagine one would find that their mental picture of a parson is like the clerical caricatures in

the moving-pictures. They might even habitually refer to all preachers as "men of God," and yet they have come out, on a rainy day, to hear what you may have to say about religion. No, there must be no shifting of your brain into neutral today, no careless idling along of your tongue. There is rather too much at stake for that.

THE GREAT NEED OF OUR DAY

THERE will be others, of course, in the group — of a wide variety of church connections back at home, but all deeply affected by the atmosphere of the University, and all in a mood to question anything you say. And that brings you sharply face to face with a question of your own: What in the world *am* I going to say?

"We are living in an age" — so, perhaps, you begin — "which the most thoughtful and competent critics seem to agree is pretty seriously 'out of joint.' There are various ways of describing the central difficulty, and various ways of analyzing its cause and cure; but in general it seems to be a question of balance between what we commonly call the material and the spiritual values. Modern science has placed in our hands an unprecedented measure of control over the physical world, but we do not seem to have as yet ac-

quired the ability to make wise use of this new power. And science itself disclaims any obligation to provide this wisdom.

WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY?

"IN his review of the work of the Rockefeller Foundation for 1936, Raymond Fosdick quotes Sir Alfred Ewing as saying: 'The command of Nature has been put into man's hands before he knows how to command himself'; and Sir Josiah Stamp as saying: 'We are like a contractor who has too many men bringing materials on to the site, and not enough men to erect the buildings with them.' Then Dr. Fosdick himself says: 'Natural Science does not hold itself responsible for the intelligence or the capacity of those who apply its findings. Its discoveries are left on the doorstep of society with no directions as to how they are to be cared for.'

"Where, then, does this responsibility lie? Who is to provide society with the wisdom that will prevent these new discoveries being used so as to produce chaos and disaster? Science declines to accept the obligation, but who is willing to assume it? Who is competent to assume it? In what direction can a confused and deeply troubled world turn, with any assurance that the light it so desperately needs will be found available? These

are the most searching and important questions of our day, and they are not merely academic questions. They are of vital and imperative concern to everyone who thinks at all about the world today.

THE ANSWER IS RELIGION

"THE answers lie in the realm of religion, and the practical aspect of those answers has to do with the possibility of creating organized forms of religious life that are consistent with the conditions and temper of the present age. What our world needs is religion, and the only way in which religion can become effective is through churches. But it must be a form of religion in harmony with the thinking of an age dominated by science, and they must be churches in harmony with the underlying democratic impulses and sentiments of our American civilization.

"If now you have followed my argument, I think you will agree with me that at this point you are face to face with a personal question of some importance — a question that presents itself to you with special force because, as students or as teachers in a great University, you are inescapably among those to whom the rest of us look for leadership. The question is, What are you doing to help create the kind of organized re-

ligious life in this country which can adequately take on the responsibility which science (firmly and properly) declines to accept?

"It is not my business to answer that question. Nobody can answer it for you, of course. But I have made it my business to put the question, and I hope I have put it in such a way that it will pester you and irritate you and annoy you until you have found a real answer for yourselves."

OUR GREAT OPPORTUNITY

ALL over this country there are colleges and universities where the finest young people in the world are making an honest effort to think through the questions I have indicated above. There are hundreds of such schools, and many thousands of such young men and women. To a very considerable degree, the destinies of America lie in the answers which these young people make to these questions.

What are we Unitarians doing to help? We are doing something—yes; and I wish I had space to tell in detail of what is being done, in the name of our Unitarian faith, in college towns like Lincoln, Nebraska, and Eugene, Oregon, and perhaps twenty others. But when the whole story is told, it is only a drop in the bucket. We have still

to face up to our responsibility as a denomination with regard to the college students of America.

RESPONSIBILITY WE ALL SHARE

THREE things are necessary if we are to fulfill our obligations in this field: wise planning, effective leadership, and money. So far as the first two are concerned, there could hardly be any doubt as to their importance; and those now in charge of the denominational work are bending every effort toward the development of both plans and leadership. But it may not be so clear why we need money.

Most of the colleges and universities of this country are located in towns and cities of less than 100,000 population, and experience has shown that it is almost impossible to maintain a Unitarian church in such communities, on a scale adequate for carrying out an attractive program for students, without some form of denominational assistance. There are exceptions, of course; but I think the general statement holds. An effective program for students, on the large scale, must receive more than merely local backing. It is a general denominational responsibility, carried out through local parishes and adapted wisely to varying conditions and needs, but frankly subsidized by the fellowship as a whole.

THE ANNUAL APPEAL

THERE are many reasons why we hope that the response to this year's "Annual Appeal" may be generous. We have asked that the total contributions from churches and individuals be increased by something like 80% — to make a real start on our new program of Unitarian Extension. And unless we receive such support, we cannot go forward along any of the lines of advance now projected.

But among the reasons for a new spirit of generous giving among Unitarians I think there is none so appealing and none so promising as the chance to strengthen our parish churches in college and university towns, and then to go out into a nation-wide campaign to bring our Unitarian message to every college campus in America!

F. M. E.

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